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Kunoichi #1

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Ninja

RESURRECTION (PART 1 OF 3)

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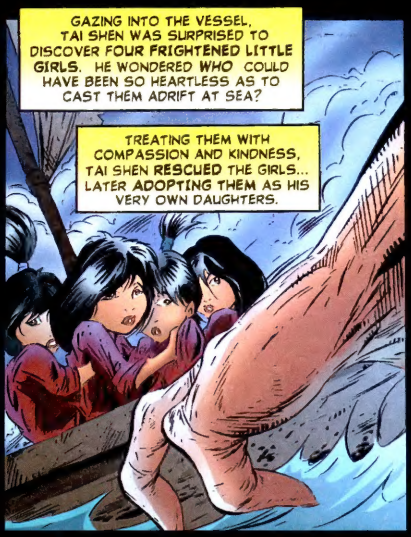
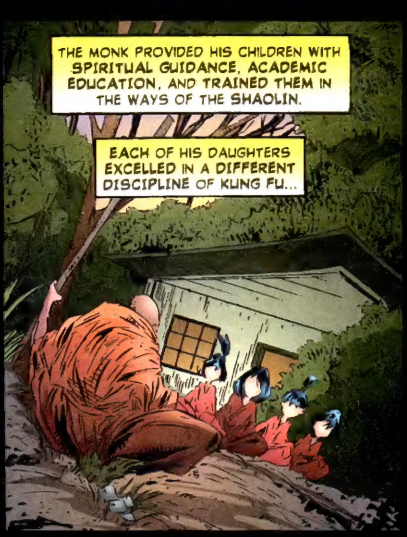
THE YEAR...1605. THE PLACE...SOMEWHERE OFF THE COAST OF JAPAN. HERE, A WANDERING MONK SAILS DEEP INTO THE UNKNOWN, IN SEARCH OF... HIS DESTINY.
HIS NAME IS TAI SHEN, A MASTER OF SHAOLIN KUNG FU. HIS LIFE WAS ONCE HIDDEN BEHIND THE WALLS OF A SHAOLIN MONASTERY IN BEJING, CHINA. BUT SOMETHING WAS MISSING IN THIS MONK'S LIFE... SOMETHING WHICH TORE AT HIS INNER BEING...AND CAST HIS THOUGHTS TO FAR AWAY PLACES.
IN HIS MIND'S EYE, HE VISUALIZED A NEW LAND, A NEW BEGINNING...TO FULFIL HIS CALLING, HIS DESTINY.
AND SO, ON THIS BEAUTIFUL SUMMER MORNING, TAI SHEN GAVE IN TO HIS HEART AND DEPARTED IN SEARCH OF HIS FUTURE.
BRAVING THE VAST, TREACHEROUS SEA OF JAPAN, THE MONK SAILED THE GREAT OCEAN FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE AN ETERNITY. HIS JOURNEY STARTED TO SEEM LIKE ALL WAS FOR NAUGHT, WHEN SUDDENLY ON THE DISTANT HORIZON, HE SPIED SOMETHING ODD.
WITH PATIENT DETERMINATION, HE SAILED IN PURSUIT OF THE SMALL OBJECT, EVER CLOSER... EVER CLOSER.
AS THE MYSTERIOUS OBJECT CAME INTO FOCUS, TAI SHEN REALIZED THAT WHAT HE'D FOUND WAS NOTHING MORE THAN AN OLD, TATTERED BOAT.


GAZING INTO THE VESSEL, TAI SHEN WAS SURPRISED TO DISCOVER FOUR FRIGHTENED LITTLE GIRLS. HE WONDERED WHO COULD HAVE BEEN SO HEARTLESS AS TO CAST THEM ADRIFT AT SEA?
TREATING THEM WITH COMPASSION AND KINDNESS, TAI SHEN RESCUED THE GIRLS... LATER ADOPTING THEM AS HIS VERY OWN DAUGHTERS.


THE MONK PROVIDED HIS CHILDREN WITH SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE, ACADEMIC EDUCATION, AND TRAINED THEM IN THE WAYS OF THE SHAOLIN.
EACH OF HIS DAUGHTERS EXCELLED IN A DIFFERENT DISCIPLINE OF KUNG FU...

KAIRA, THE TIGER...

SAIPEI, THE CRANE...

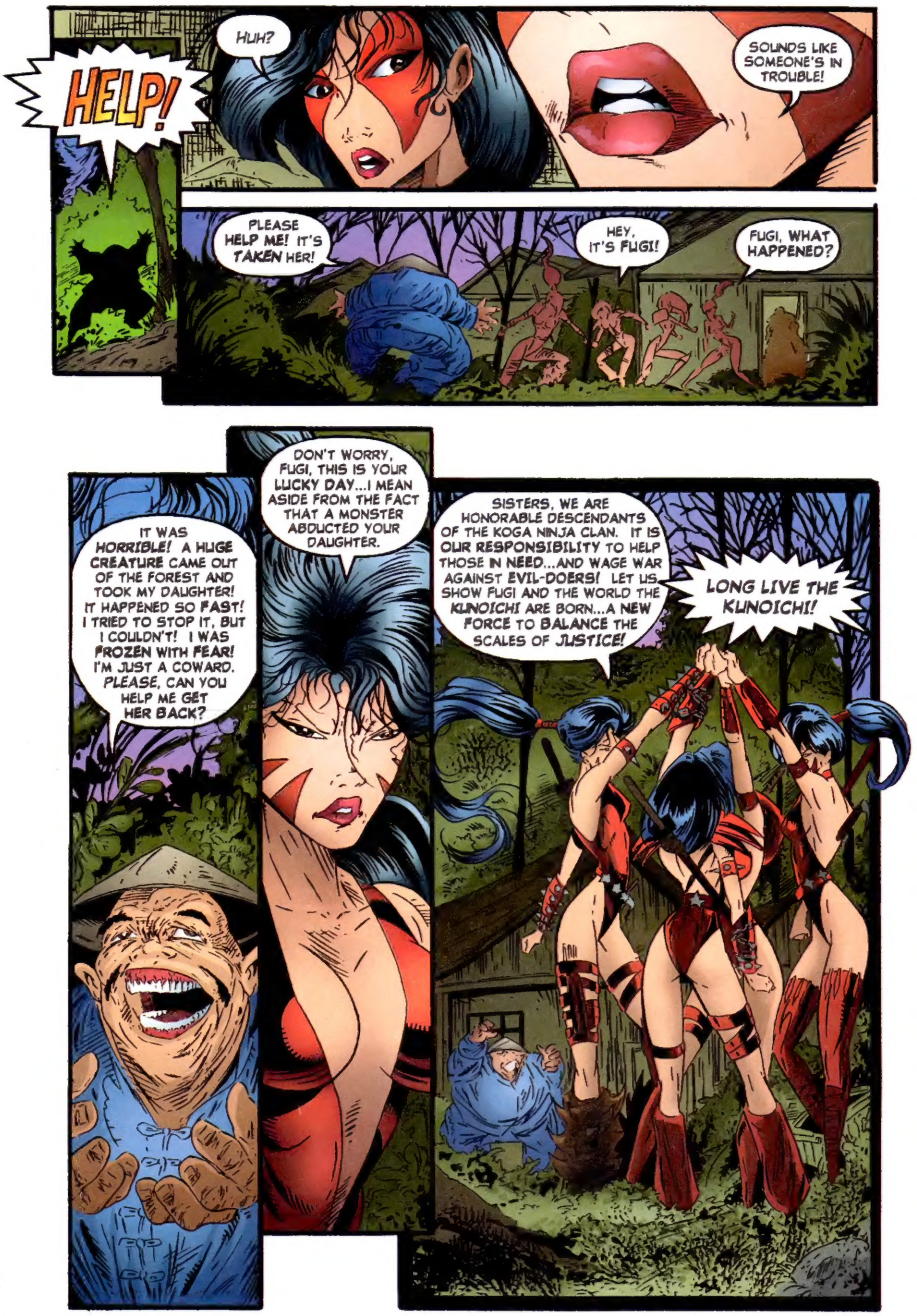
MIYO, THE COBRA...

AND SORI, THE DRAGON.

THIRTEEN YEARS LATER.
ALONE, DEEP IN MEDITATION, TAI SHEN IS UNAWARE OF THE DANGER APPROACHING... OR SO IT SEEMS.
THUK
HUH?
AIEEE!
ATTACK!
YOU DARE ATTACK AN OLD MAN WHILE HE'S MEDITATING?
NOW, YOU SHALL FACE THE FURY OF THE SHAOLIN! SURRENDER OR DIE!

SURRENDER? WE KNOW NOT THE MEANING OF THE WORD!
YOUR SWIFTNESS IS IMPRESSIVE...BUT NO MATCH FOR THIS OLD MAN! I STILL POSSESS THE REFLEXES OF A CAT!
YOUR TIME HAS PASSED!
I GIVE YOU YOUR FINAL WARNING... SURRENDER OR DIE!
THANK YOU, FATHER. NOW...CAN WE EAT? ALL THIS TRAINING HAS MADE ME HUNGRY ENOUGH TO EAT AN ENTIRE BOAR'S LEG!
OK, BRAVE FATHER. WE SURRENDER! BUT MARK MY WORDS, ONE DAY YOU WILL SURRENDER TO US!
HA-HA-HA! PERHAPS YOU ARE RIGHT, KAIRA, BUT NOT TODAY!
YOUR SKILLS ARE EVER-IMPROVING, MY DAUGHTERS, WHICH MAKES ME VERY PROUD!

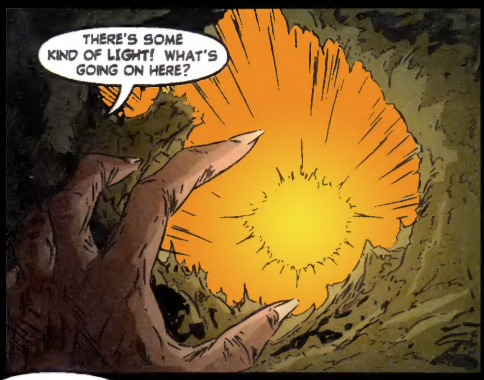
LATER THAT NIGHT...
MY DAUGHTERS, PLEASE...SIT WITH ME. I MUST TELL YOU SOMETHING I BELIEVE YOU ARE NOW READY TO HEAR.
WHAT IS IT, FATHER?
MANY YEARS AGO WHEN I FOUND YOU ADRIFT AT SEA, I ALSO FOUND A LETTER HIDDEN INSIDE A FLASK. I THINK IT IS TIME YOU LEARNED YOUR TRUE HERITAGE.
THE LETTER READS, "To whomever reads this... please watch over my precious girls and raise them well. Fourteen days ago, my village, in the Koga province, was attacked by General Nobunaga and his samurai.
"While most of our people were killed, a few of our clan managed to escape...taking refuge in the Iga mountains. We know Nobunaga is not far behind and our time is running out."
"Because I fear the worst, I am casting my daughters out to sea... I ask whomever finds them to raise the girls as their own...training them in the ways of the ninja. Do this, kind soul, as my dying request...please watch over my little Kunoichi."
HOW SAD. SO VERY SAD.
FATHER, WHAT IS KUNOICHI?
SORI, IT MEANS "FEMALE NINJA." YOU ARE ALL PROUD DESCENDANTS OF THE KOGA NINJA CLAN.
BUT WE TRAINED AS SHAOLIN!
FATHER, FROM THIS DAY FORWARD, WE MUST HONOR OUR FAMILY BY ACKNOWLEDGING OUR ANCESTRY. WE WILL FOREVER BE KNOWN AS KUNOICHI!


HELP!
HUH?
SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE'S IN TROUBLE!
PLEASE HELP ME! IT'S TAKEN HER!
HEY, IT'S FUGI!
FUGI, WHAT HAPPENED?
IT WAS HORRIBLE! A HUGE CREATURE CAME OUT OF THE FOREST AND TOOK MY DAUGHTER! IT HAPPENED SO FAST! I TRIED TO STOP IT, BUT I COULDN'T! I WAS FROZEN WITH FEAR! I'M JUST A COWARD. PLEASE, CAN YOU HELP ME GET HER BACK?
DON'T WORRY, FUGI, THIS IS YOUR LUCKY DAY...I MEAN ASIDE FROM THE FACT THAT A MONSTER ABDUCTED YOUR DAUGHTER.
SISTERS, WE ARE HONORABLE DESCENDANTS OF THE KOGA NINJA CLAN. IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP THOSE IN NEED...AND WAGE WAR AGAINST EVIL-DOERS! LET US SHOW FUGI AND THE WORLD THE KUNOICHI ARE BORN...A NEW FORCE TO BALANCE THE SCALES OF JUSTICE!
LONG LIVE THE KUNOICHI!

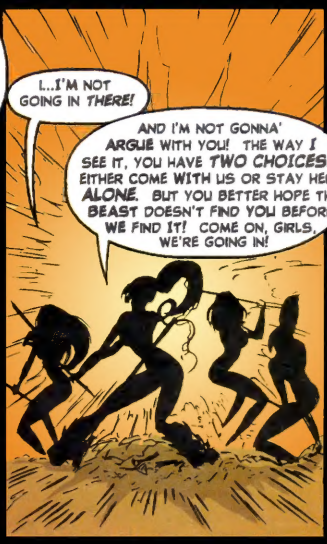
DEEP WITHIN THE KAIZO FOREST...
STAY ON THE LOOKOUT, GIRLS. THERE MUST BE A CLUE, SOMEWHERE! THEY COULDN'T HAVE JUST VANISHED!
THIS IS HOPELESS! WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR HOURS! LET'S JUST HEAD BACK AND START LOOKING AGAIN IN THE MORNING.
NO, WAIT! I THINK I'VE FOUND SOMETHING!
WHAT IS IT, MIYO?
IT LOOKS LIKE HUGE FOOTPRINTS...
AND THEY LEAD RIGHT TO THAT CAVE!
HEY, GUYS... MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T GO IN THERE. IT LOOKS KINDA'...SPOOKY.
BITE YOUR TONGUE, SORI! ARE YOU FORGETTING WHO YOU ARE? YOU'RE KUNOICHI! YOU FEAR NOTHING! NOW, LET'S GO!

STAY CLOSE BEHIND ME! IT LOOKS LIKE THE TRACKS CONTINUE DOWN THIS CAVERN. BE ON GUARD!

AN HOUR LATER.
WAIT, I THINK I SEE SOMETHING UP AHEAD!
IT'S ABOUT TIME!


THERE'S SOME KIND OF LIGHT! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

MIYO, THAT'S NO LIGHT! YOU REMEMBER THE STORY FATHER TOLD US ABOUT THE GATEWAY TO THE UNDERWORLD? THE ONE THAT LEADS TO THE CASTLE OF THE DEAD? WELL, I THINK THIS IS IT!


I...I'M NOT GOING IN THERE!
AND I'M NOT GONNA' ARGUE WITH YOU! THE WAY I SEE IT, YOU HAVE TWO CHOICES... EITHER COME WITH US OR STAY HERE ALONE. BUT YOU BETTER HOPE THE BEAST DOESN'T FIND YOU BEFORE WE FIND IT! COME ON, GIRLS, WE'RE GOING IN!

WOW! LOOK AT THIS PLACE! IT'S NOT AT ALL WHAT I EXPECTED. LEGEND SPOKE OF THIS PLACE AS BEING THE BREEDING GROUND OF ALL THAT IS EVIL. BUT THERE'S NOTHING HERE...EXCEPT FOR SOME KIND OF WEIRD SAC-LIKE PLANTS. HMM...STRANGE...
KAIRA, WHAT NOW?
NOW WE TAKE A LOOK OVER THERE...
IN THE CASTLE OF THE DEAD.
LEGEND TELLS US THE CASTLE IS INFESTED WITH THE MOST VILE OF EVIL, SPAWNED FROM WITHIN THE BOWELS OF DARKNESS. OUR MISSION IS SIMPLE. WE GO IN, FIND FUGI'S DAUGHTER... AND GET THE HELL OUTTA' THERE AS FAST AS WE CAN! IF WE ENCOUNTER ANY OF THE CASTLES "OCCUPANTS," THERE SHOULD BE NO HOLDING BACK! IF WE FIGHT... WE FIGHT TO THE DEATH!
NOW... LET'S GET MOVING!

ANYONE SEE ANYTHING?
NO...NOT YET. BUT WHAT IS THAT SMELL? IT'S AWFUL!
GIRLS, BE CAREFUL GOING ACROSS THIS...
BRIDGE!
AAAH!
DEAR BUDDHA, PLEASE HELP US!
THUMP
OW!
IS EVERYONE OK? THAT WAS SOME DROP!
NOOO!
DID YOU HEAR THAT?
IT SOUNDED LIKE A SCREAM! LET'S GO!

YUUMM!!
WHOA! YOU GUYS SEE WHAT I SEE? WHAT ARE THESE THINGS?!
I DON'T KNOW... BUT GET THEM OFF OF ME!
IT'S SLICIN' AND DICIN' TIME!
NOW YOU'VE DONE IT! FEEL THE WRATH OF THE KUNOICHI, EVIL ONES!
DIE, DEMON SCUM!
TAKE THAT...YOU UGLY FREAKS OF NATURE!

WHY, HELLO THERE!
FORGIVE MY RUDENESS... AND PLEASE EXCUSE MY PETS.
YOU SEE, WE SELDOM HAVE ANYONE PASS THROUGH THIS WAY...AND WE SHAMEFULLY FORGET OUR MANNERS.
SMAK!
HUH?
PLEASE, WON'T YOU STAY FOR DINNER?
TONIGHT WILL BE THE FEAST OF ALL FEASTS! NOT ONE... BUT FIVE TASTLY MORSELS FOR ME AND MY BROOD!
BUT WAIT! I'M BEING HASTY. WHY NOT HAVE SOME FUN, FIRST.
I KNOW YOU'VE COME TO RESCUE A YUMMY LITTLE GIRL. TAKE HER, IF YOU CAN, BUT IF I GET AHOLD OF YOU FIRST, IT'S ALL OVER! LET THE CONTEST BEGIN!
HELP ME!

THE ONLY GAME YOU'RE GONNA' BE PLAYING...IS SIX FEET UNDER!
WHY YOU LITTLE...
AAAGH!
WHUP
HOW'S IT FEEL TO HAVE YOUR SKULL BASHED IN BY YOUR DINNER?!
LET THIS BE A LESSON TO YOU, BEAST! WHEN YOU FACE THE KUNOICHI, THERE IS NO ESCAPING DEFEAT! GET IT?!
SQUISH!

HMMPH! SO MUCH FOR THAT "MIGHTY BEAST!" WHAT A TRULY PATHETIC EXCUSE FOR A MONSTER...ALL BARK AND NO BITE!
THOSE WEIRD, LITTLE, JUMPIN' CRITTERS DIDN'T PUT UP MUCH OF A FIGHT, EITHER.
JUST BE GLAD THEY DIDN'T! NOW, LET'S FIND FUGI'S DAUGHTER AND GET OUT OF HERE...BEFORE WE RUN INTO SOMETHING ELSE.
TOO LATE FOR THAT, GIRL!
Oh!

YOU KILLED OUR BROTHER! NOW, WE WILL KILL YOU!
Oh, no!
LET'S ROCK!
THE KUNOICHI RETURN IN A THREE ISSUE MINI-SERIES ON SALE IN NOVEMBER. DON'T MISS IT!

LIGHTNING COMICS FAN BONUS

DON'T STOP NOW...
THIS COMIC BOOK CONTAINS TWO EXCITING STORIES!
JUST FLIP THE BOOK OVER AND YOU'LL
BE READING EITHER:

KUNOICHI # 1

OR

SINJA RESURRECTION # 1

ONLY
FROM...

LIGHTNING COMICS™

TOKYO, JAPAN... PRESENT DAY.
SOME SAY THAT THE HEART OF DARKNESS BREEDS IN THE HEARTS OF MEN, FESTERING INTO UNSPEAKABLE HORRORS.
THE PATH ONE CHOOSES IN LIFE CAN LEAD IN MANY DIRECTIONS. SOME WILL CHOOSE THE PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, OTHERS MAY BE TEMPTED TO FOLLOW THE WAYS OF THE WICKED.
THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE MAN HAS NO CHOICE...THAT THE COURSE OF LIFE IS PRE-DESTINED AT THE MOMENT OF BIRTH.
FOR SHIRO TAGANAGA, THE PATH HAS BEEN BESIEGED WITH TREACHERY. AT A YOUNG AGE, HIS FAMILY WAS SLAUGHTERED BEFORE HIS VERY EYES. HE FOUND HIMSELF ORPHANED. AND, IN A MOMENT OF GLOOM... WHEN ALL HOPE SEEMED LOST, HE WAS TAKEN INTO THE DAKA-RYU NINJA CLAN, LED BY THE MERCILESS JONIN, KOTARO.
FOR SHIRO TAGANAGA, THE PATH HAS BEEN BESIEGED WITH TREACHERY. AT A YOUNG AGE, HIS FAMILY WAS SLAUGHTERED BEFORE HIS VERY EYES. HE FOUND HIMSELF ORPHANED. AND, IN A MOMENT OF GLOOM...WHEN ALL HOPE SEEMED LOST, HE WAS TAKEN INTO THE DAKA-RYU NINJA CLAN, LED BY THE MERCILESS JONIN, KOTARO.
OVER MANY YEARS, KOTARO TAUGHT SHIRO THE WAYS OF THE NINJA...TO EXPLOIT HIS "HIDDEN POWERS"... BESTOWED UPON HIM BY HIS ANCIENT ANCESTOR, HARATSU TAGANAGA. EVENTUALLY, KOTARO BETRAYED SHIRO, MURDERING HIM...JUST AS HE HAD DONE TO HIS FAMILY. SOON THEREAFTER, SHIRO FOUND HIMSELF RESURRECTED BY SEISHIN, THE "SPIRIT OF LIFE." HOWEVER, BEFORE HIS SOUL CAN REST IN ETERNAL PEACE, SHIRO MUST LIVE IN TORMENT...WITH NO REWARD OF DEATH. AT LEAST NOT UNTIL HE FINDS AND DESTROYS THE FIVE ETERNAL DEMONS RELEASED BY HIM THROUGH THE TREACHERY OF KOTARO.
THE CHILD ONCE KNOWN AS SHIRO DIED LONG AGO. NOW, IN HIS PLACE, DWELLS A CREATURE OF SHADOWS KNOWN AS SINJA!
SEE SINJA: DEADLY SINS #1 FOR SINJA'S DETAILED ORIGIN.

STALKING HIS PREY, SINJA LEAPS THROUGH THE NIGHT SKY, STEALTHILY GLIDING TO THE ALLEY BELOW.
WITH THE SKILL OF A CAT, HE SILENTLY LANDS ONLY A FEW FEET BEHIND THE UNSUSPECTING YAKUZA.
NOWHERE TO RUN, ZUKI! LOOKS LIKE THE END OF THE LINE FOR YOU!
ENOUGH VICTIMS HAVE PERISHED UNTO THESE MORTALS. TONIGHT, I WILL END THEIR REIGN OF CARNAGE. IT STOPS, NOW!
A RAGE BEGINS TO SURGE THROUGH SINJA'S BODY AS HIS THOUGHTS BECOME ENTHRALLED WITH DEATH. HIS BLOOD BEGINS TO BOIL WITH VENGEANCE.
HE KNOWS HE MUST KILL ON THIS NIGHT!

PLEASE, MR. HORO, DON'T KILL ME! JUST TWO MORE DAYS... I PROMISE...I'LL HAVE YOUR...
SHADDUP!
LISTEN UP. I'M GONNA' TELL YA' THIS ONCE! THEN YA' DIE! THE YAKUZA DON'T TAKE KINDLY TO BEING DOUBLE-CROSSED! WHEN WE DEAL WITH SCUM LIKE YOU, WE EXPECT TO GET PAID IN FULL...PLUS INTEREST! TRYIN' TA' SKIP TOWN JUST AIN'T COOL! NOW, WHERE THE HELL'S OUR MONEY?!
THE MAN'S FEAR IS HEIGHTENED BY SOMETHING FAR MORE SINISTER LURKING IN THE SHADOWS BEHIND THE YAKUZA.
PLEASE... PLEASE, GOD.
NO!
MORTALS, I HAVE TRAVELED GREAT DISTANCES IN MY QUEST FOR REDEMPTION. I SEEK THE FIVE BEASTS OF DEATH...AND YOU REEK WITH THE STENCH OF EVIL. SEARCHING INTO YOUR MINDS, I SENSE A CONSPIRACY WITH MY ENEMIES. YOU WILL TELL ME WHERE TO FIND THEM...OR I SHALL TAKE GREAT PLEASURE SENDING YOUR SOULS TO HELL!
WHAT THE...? OBVIOUSLY YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH, CLOWN! LET'S BLAST 'IM!
RATTATA
POW!
POW!
POW!
UMMMPH!
IN A BLAZE OF FIRE, MOLTEN BULLETS TEAR INTO SINJA'S DECAYED FLESH, PENETRATING DEEP INTO HIS ROTTEN CORPSE.

GOOD JOB, BOYS! AIN'T NOBODY GONNA' RECOGNIZE THAT MESS!
NOW, WHERE WERE WE? WHAT THE...?
YOUR SHURIKEN STING LIKE THE BITES OF AN INSECT...BUT ARE NOTHING MORE THAN AN ANNOYANCE! IS THAT THE BEST YOU CAN DO, MORTALS? I WAS HOPING YOU'D PRESENT MORE OF A CHALLENGE!
IT'S... IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! HE'S STILL ALIVE!
ODD, THESE TINY SHURIKEN. COULD THESE SMALL OBJECTS ACTUALLY BRING DEATH? SURELY SOMETHING SO AMUSINGLY TINY COULD NOT BE HARMFUL TO ONE'S FLESH!?
MY GOD! WHAT THE HELL IS THIS GUY MADE OF? HE MUST BE SOME SORTA' FREAK! BLAST HIM!

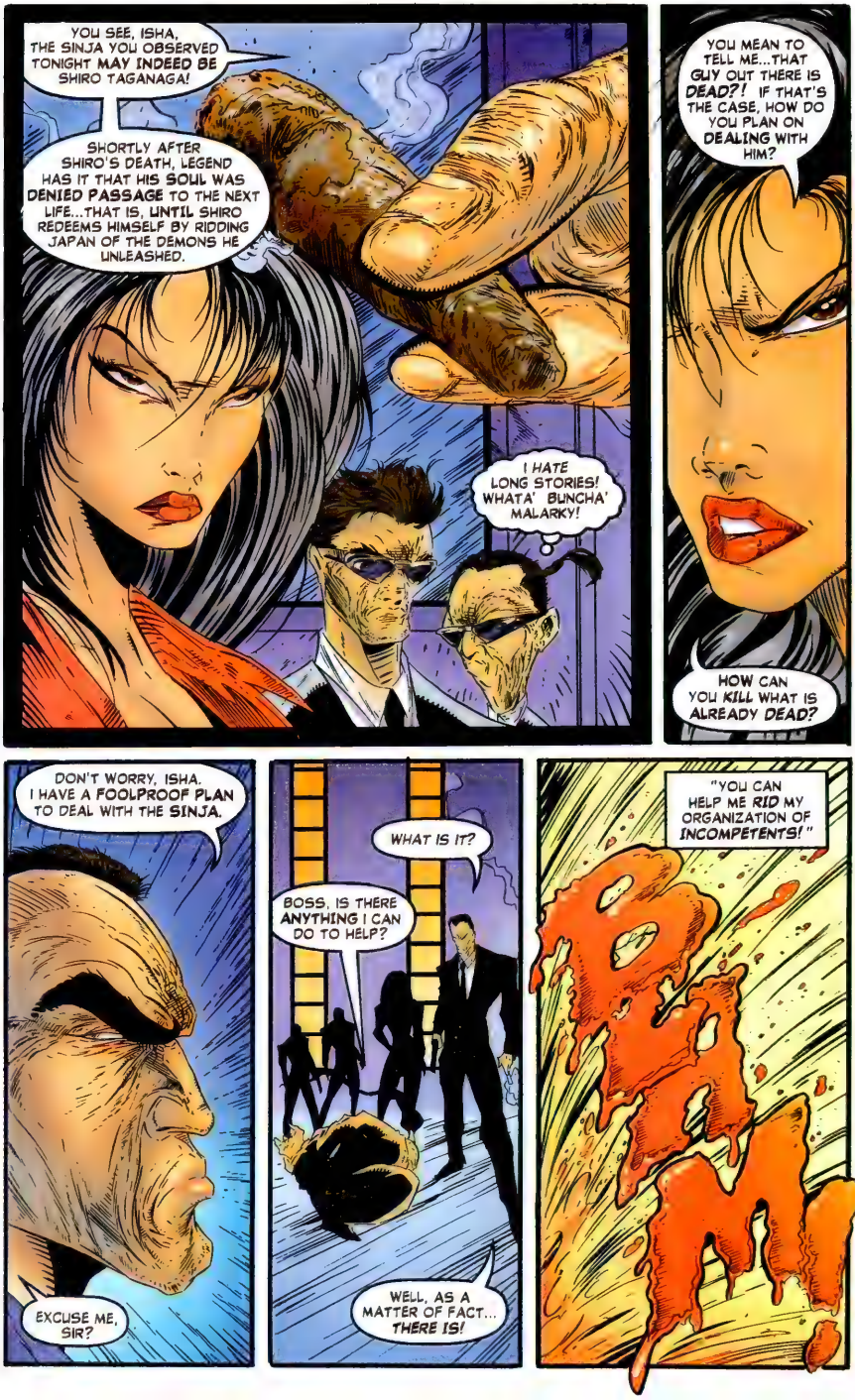
THIS TIME...STAY DEAD!
BLAM! BLAM!
FOOLISH MORTALS! YOU CANNOT KILL WHAT IS ALREADY DEAD!
MY PATIENCE DRAWS THIN. SINCE YOU WILL NOT TELL ME WHAT I DESIRE, THEN...AS PROMISED... YOU SHALL DIE!
BEFORE THEY CAN REACT, TWO OF THE THUGS ARE STRUCK BY SINJA'S SHURIKEN... KILLING THEM INSTANTLY.
THUK
THUK
THUK
YES! RUN TO YOUR MASTER AND INFORM HIM...SINJA IS COMING! BEWARE, AT OUR NEXT ENCOUNTER I WILL NOT BE SO GENEROUS!
TH...THANKS, MISTER!
FOOLISH MORTAL! I CARE NOTHING FOR YOUR MISERABLE LIFE! I WAS MERELY SENDING A MESSAGE! SAVING YOU FROM THE DEMONS' HENCHMEN SEEMED LIKE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO DO SO. TELL ALL WHOM YOU MEET THAT YOU HAVE SEEN THE SINJA...OR I WILL FINISH THE YAKUZA'S JOB FOR THEM. NOW, BEGONE!
GULP!
SO, THE LEGENDS ARE TRUE! THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE END!

LATER THAT NIGHT AT YAKUZA HEADQUARTERS...
I SEND YA' OUT TO DO A SIMPLE JOB AND WHAT HAPPENS? YA' SCREW IT ALL TO HELL! NOW, I'M TIRED OF THESE GAMES. I WANT SOME ANSWERS!
PLEASE, MR. TOKUGAWA, I'M SORRY. IT WASN'T MY FAULT, HONEST. I'LL TELL YA' WHAT REALLY HAPPENED. JUST DON'T BEAT ME NO MORE, PLEASE!
START TALKING!
YOU SEE, ME AND THE BOYS WERE TAKIN' CARE OF BUSINESS... JUST LIKE YA' WANTED. THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN, TWENTY OR SO NINJAS POPPED OUTTA' NOWHERE...AND STARTED KICKIN' OUR BUTTS! THEN THEY THREW SOME OF THOSE METAL STARS AND HIT IKO AND RORO RIGHT IN THEIR HEADS! IT WAS HORRIBLE, SIR. I MUSTA' TOOK OUT AT LEAST FIFTEEN OF THE BASTARDS BEFORE I FINALLY ESCAPED.
I DAMN NEAR DIDN'T GET OUT ALIVE, SIR. PLEASE, BELIEVE ME, IT'S THE GOD'S HONEST TRUTH!
THAT'S FUNNY, HOJO. I KINDA' REMEMBER IT HAPPENING A BIT DIFFERENTLY.
SWACK!
MR. TOKUGAWA, SIR. FOLLOWING YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, I WAS HIDING IN THE SHADOWS...MAKING SURE HOJO AND HIS FRIENDS DIDN'T SCREW UP THEIR ASSIGNMENT...WHEN SUDDENLY, A MAN CAME OUT OF THE DARKNESS AND ATTACKED! THE BOYS BEGAN FIRING...BUT IT DIDN'T SEEM TO HARM HIM AT ALL! THEY MUST HAVE SHOT HIM A HUNDRED TIMES! HE DIDN'T SEEM HUMAN, SIR.
AH, ISHA, MY FINEST AGENT! TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS MOST PUZZLING SITUATION?
DID HE HAVE A NAME?
YES. HE CALLED HIMSELF SINJA.
SINJA! CAN IT BE? COULD THIS BE THE SINJA THAT MY MASTER HAS SPOKEN OF?
GULP.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS? IF THIS IS, IN FACT, THE SINJA OF LEGEND, THEN THE DAY OF RECKONING IS UPON US!
SIR, FORGIVE ME FOR MY IGNORANCE, BUT WHO IS THIS SINJA YOU SPEAK OF?
THE DAY OF RECKONING?
AH, YES. WHO IS HE, INDEED. YOU SEE...ACCORDING TO LEGEND, IT ALL BEGAN CENTURIES AGO...

...IN THE IGA MOUNTAINS. LEGEND HAS IT THAT JUNAN, MASTER OF THE MYSTICAL DAKA-RYU NINJA CLAN, MADE A DEAL WITH KU, THE SPIRIT OF DEATH, WHICH FOREVER ALTERED THE COURSE OF JAPANESE HISTORY.
JUNAN POSSESSED AN INSATIABLE HUNGER FOR POWER AND DOMINANCE. KU TRAINED HIM IN THE DARK ARTS AND OFFERED JUNAN IMMORTALITY IN EXCHANGE FOR RELEASING FIVE ELEMENTAL DEMONS FROM THE "SPIRIT REALM."
WITHOUT HESITATION, JUNAN AGREED...ASSUMING ONCE RELEASED, HE WOULD CONTROL THE BEASTS FROM HELL.
NEEDLESS TO SAY, THIS DEAL WAS ROTTEN FROM THE START.
WHEN JUNAN SUMMONED THE DEMONS, KU'S TREACHERY BECAME APPARENT.
THE FIVE FACES OF EVIL - CHI, SUI, MOKU, KA AND KIN - LAUGHED AT JUNAN. TO THINK THEY WOULD SWEAR ALLEGIANCE TO ANY MAN WAS AN INSULT PUNISHABLE BY DEATH.
IN A BLINDING LIGHT, JUNAN'S FLESH BURST INTO FLAMES AND INCINERATED INTO ASHES. THE DEMONS STOOD READY TO LAY WASTE TO ALL IN THEIR PATH.
MAN BY MAN, VILLAGE BY VILLAGE, THE EVIL THEY SPREAD WAS IMMEASURABLE. NO ONE ESCAPED THEIR FURY OR CAPTIVITY...
EXCEPT FOR ONE MAN WHO STOOD IN DEFIANCE. WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF SEISHAN, THE SPIRIT OF LIFE HARATSU TAGANAGA ROSE FROM THE DEAD TO DEFEAT THE DEMONIC BEINGS.
ONE BY ONE, HARATSU HUNTED AND DESTROYED THE FIVE BEASTS, RETURNING THEIR DARK SOULS FROM WHENCE THEY CAME. IN THE END, HARATSU GAVE HIS OWN LIFE BUT HIS ACTS OF COURAGE ARE REMEMBERED BY MANY WHO REVERE TAGANAGA AS JAPAN'S SAVIOR.

OVER FOUR HUNDRED YEARS FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF HARATSU TAGANAGA, KOTARO, MASTER OF THE NAGA-RYU, ALSO YEARNED TO RULE JAPAN AS ITS ONLY MASTER.
JUST AS KU, THE SPIRIT OF DEATH, VISITED JUNAN, SO DID HE VISIT KOTARO.
KOTARO WAS TOLD THAT IF HE TRULY WANTED TO HARNESS THE FORCES OF THE UNIVERSE, HE MUST HONOR KU'S REQUEST TO BREAK HARATSU TAGANAGA'S SPELL AND RELEASE THE FIVE ELEMENTAL DEMONS FROM IMPRISONMENT. TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, HE WOULD NEED THE ASSISTANCE OF A DESCENDANT OF THE TAGANAGA FAMILY... A CHILD WITH SPECIAL INHERITED POWERS KNOWN AS SHIRO TAGANAGA.
IN A CAREFULLY CONCEIVED PLOT, KOTARO'S NINJA ATTACKED THE TAGANAGA CASTLE. SHIRO'S MOTHER WAS SLAIN...
WHILE SHIRO WAS "RESCUED"...BELIEVING THE MYSTERIOUS KOTARO TO BE AN ALLY OF HIS FAMILY.
OVER THE ENSUING YEARS, KOTARO TAUGHT SHIRO THE WAYS OF THE NINJA, DEVELOPING SHIRO'S "SPECIAL POWERS" FOR HIS OWN DEVIOUS PURPOSES. IN HIS FINAL TEAST OF NINJITSU MASTERY, SHIRO WAS CHANLLENGED TO BRING FORTH THE FIVE BEASTS OF THE ELEMENTS.
AS THE DEMON APPEARED, KOTARO SEVERED SHIRO'S HEAD IN HIS FINAL ACT OF BETRAYAL.
WITH A SENSE OF DIVINE JUSTICE, THE DEMONS IMMEDIATELY KILLED KOTARO... LEADING ONE TO CONCLUDE THAT THE SPIRIT OF DEATH IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED...EVER!
FORGIVE, SIR, BUT WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH THE MAN CALLED SINJA?


YOU SEE, ISHA, THE SINJA YOU OBSERVED TONIGHT MAY INDEED BE SHIRO TAGANAGA!
SHORTLY AFTER SHIRO'S DEATH, LEGEND HAS IT THAT HIS SOUL WAS DENIED PASSAGE TO THE NEXT LIFE...THAT IS, UNTIL SHIRO REDEEMS HIMSELF BY RIDDING JAPAN OF THE DEMONS HE UNLEASHED.
I HATE LONG STORIES! WHATA' BUNCHA' MALARKY!
YOU MEAN TO TELL ME...THAT GUY OUT THERE IS DEAD?! IF THAT'S THE CASE, HOW DO YOU PLAN ON DEALING WITH HIM?
HOW CAN YOU KILL WHAT IS ALREADY DEAD?
DON'T WORRY, ISHA. I HAVE A FOOLPROOF PLAN TO DEAL WITH THE SINJA.
EXCUSE ME, SIR?
WHAT IS IT?
BOSS, IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP?
WELL, AS A MATTER OF FACT... THERE IS!
"YOU CAN HELP ME RID MY ORGANIZATION OF INCOMPETENTS!"

THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
SHIRO. I'M COMING FOR YOU!
HUH? NO! IT CAN'T BE!
YOU CAN RUN, SHIRO, BUT THERE'S NO ESCAPING YOUR DESTINY!
WHERE AM I?
GOT TO GET AWAY!
THUMP

WHAT...WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE GROUND?
SHIRO, COME...BE WITH US. WE NEED YOU!
NO! PLEASE...GO AWAY. LEAVE ME ALONE!
CRAK!
MOTHER!

NOOOO!

IT...IT WAS ONLY A NIGHTMARE, NOTHING MORE!
SEISHAN, WHY HAVE YOU CURSED ME SO?
YOU FORCE ME TO WALK THIS LAND, TASTING THE DEATHS OF MY VICTIMS...BUT NEVER MY OWN!
I KNOW NOT WHY I MUST SUFFER THIS FATE...YET I KNOW WHAT MUST BE DONE TO END IT!
DEMONS!
HEAR ME! I AM COMING FOR YOU!

HE SQUATS, COWERING IN THE DARKNESS OF AN UNDERGROUND SEWER. AS THE SINJA GRITS HIS TEETH, THOUGHTS OF HIS PREY BEGIN TO HAUNT HIS MIND.
WITH EACH COLD BREATH DRAWN INTO HIS CHEST, ANTICIPATION OF THE SOON TO COME BATTLE SWELLS WITHIN HIM.
DEEP IN HIS SOUL, A HELLBORN FIRE RAGES OUT OF CONTROL. THE TIME FOR REDEMPTION DRAWS NEAR.
SIR, I AM PLEASED TO REPORT WE KNOW THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE SINJA.
AH, EXCELLENT, MR. TOKUGAWA! IT IS TIME FOR THE RESURRECTION TO BEGIN!
TO BE CONTINUED IN...
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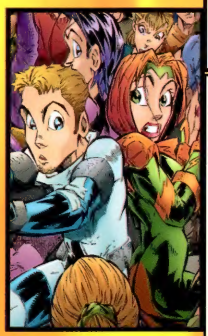

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